

# Wild Acres - Habichat

For stewards of Maryland's backyard wildlife

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**HABITAT** - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - **IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

**We want to hear from you!** Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

**Write to Me!** Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

E-Mail: [customerservice@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:customerservice@dnr.state.md.us)

### Seed Heads for Wildlife

Many gardeners cut - back the seed heads of perennial and annual flowers as soon as the bloom ceases. It keeps a garden looking tidy and does redirect the energy used to make seeds go back to the plant increasing the plant's vigor. However, if you let them go and do not "dead - head", (cut the seed head), you provide food for wildlife. An added bonus is you also create interesting shapes and forms by leaving them in the winter garden.

An excellent plant not to deadhead is Coreopsis. Goldfinches, which are year-round residents of Maryland, will constantly return to eat these flower seeds. Birds such as the Carolina Wren will also find nesting materials in the dried stalks.

Three other species to leave through the winter are Coneflower (*Echinacea*), Black - eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), and Asters.

If you are a grower of annuals, try leaving Cosmos, and Sunflowers, both large and small varieties. An amazing number of winter birds will visit those seed heads. If you decide you cannot let your garden go totally weedy all winter, you can try deadheading half of a floral planting and letting the other half remain. Remember, you can always "clean-up" the garden after the seeds are consumed. Try leaving the seed heads of flowers in the back rows of plantings. Leave those that are closest to winter cover to provide protection from predators as the birds feed on the seeds.

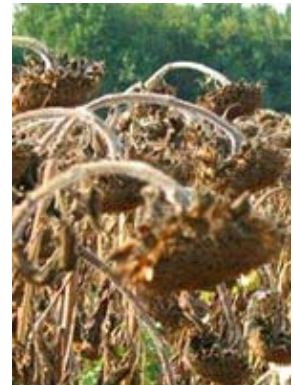
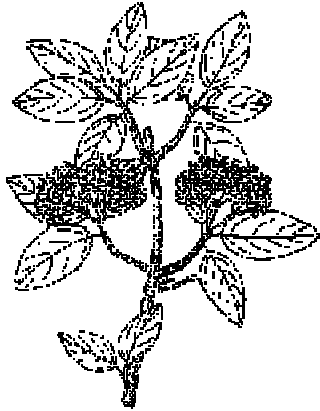


Photo of Dried Sunflowers  
Courtesy of Pete Jayne

## Native Plant Profile..... Black Haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*)

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Black Haw can be a large shrub or small tree that can reach 25 feet in height. The tree has a compact crown with a short trunk. Leaves are oval with pointed to blunt tips. Leaf margins are fine toothed. Entire leaf is smooth and leathery. Plant is found naturally on open hillsides, woodland margins and old fields.

**Flowers:** Small ivory-white clusters bloom from April thru June.

**Fruits:** Fruit is a dark blue to black fleshy fruit with a sweet pulp. Fruit matures from September to October and persist into winter.

Detail of Black Haw Leaf and Flower



**Landscape Notes:** Flowers are quite showy in the late spring. Fall foliage turns to a spectacular dark purple-scarlet. Excellent tree for showcasing in the front yard.

**Wildlife Value:** Black Haw is excellent in providing medium height nest sites, 10 to 20 feet high for songbirds. Fruit will attract cedar waxwings and brown thrashers. Bluebirds consume the fruit in the winter. Spring azure butterflies use this species as one of their food sources.

**Additional Notes:** Easy to transplant. Known for its toughness and low maintenance.

Illustration and photos of Black Haw courtesy of USGS - Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center

## Discover Maryland's Bats

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**Hoary Bats**

Photo by: Dr. J. Scott Altenbach

**Did you know that Maryland has  
ten different kinds of bats?**

**What does an echolocating bat sound like?**

**Help! I have bats in my house, what do I  
do?**

Answers to these questions and more can be  
found at the Dept. of Natural Resources new  
web page on bats:

**[www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/nhpbatintro.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/nhpbatintro.asp)**

### **The web site features:**

1. A field guide with colorful photos of all ten bats complete with natural history information to give you a glimpse at how these bats lead varied lives;
2. Information on bats and diseases that removes myth and superstition and presents the up to date information from the Centers for Disease Control and the Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene;
3. Exclusion methods that have proven successful for encouraging bats to live elsewhere other than your house and the companies that are licensed to exclude bats in Maryland;
4. Acoustic wav files of bat calls and interesting echolocation facts; and,
5. Everything you always wanted to know about bat roosting boxes and how to install them.

### **The Wildlife and Heritage Service is particularly interested in hearing from folks who:**

1. Have installed bat roosting boxes and have bats using them;
2. Know of an abandoned building, house, or bridge that houses a colony; or
3. Have a colony in their attic.

If you are interested in sharing the information from your colony, please contact Dana Limpert at 410-260-8556.

**For More Information, Click on the link below.**

**[Discover Maryland's Bats](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/nhpbatintro.asp)**

## Nest Box Maintenance

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- **October-December:** Now that nesting season is over it is time for you to inspect the nest structures that you have on your Wild Acre site. Provide a hinged side or roof so the nest box can be easily checked and cleaned each year.
- **January:** Repairs and inspections of squirrel and owl boxes should be done by January, as they are early nesters.
- **February:** Kestrel boxes should be inspected and installed by the start of February, as these birds-of-prey are one of the first migrants to return from their wintering grounds.
- **March:** You should finish your inspections and repairs by the first week in March for most songbird boxes.

### Helpful Tips

- Duck and owl box roofs kept shut with a hook or eye can be opened by a raccoon. Instead use several paired roofing nails with large heads on the side of the roof and on the upper edge of the side. Wire these paired nails together.
- Nest boxes need drainage from the rains. Four 3/8" diameter drain holes should be drilled in the bottom of every house, except for the Peterson bluebird house.
- Boxes need to be attached to a post, building or tree. When you put a nest box on a live tree, use lag bolts and washers. Unscrew them every spring to allow the tree to grow.
- Commercial martin houses are acceptable as are commercial plastic wood duck boxes. You should place the wood duck boxes in shady locations.
- Wood boards 3/4" thick are the easiest to work with when repairing or replacing nest boxes. Cedar is the all-around best choice. Softwood such as pine is ok for small boxes.
- Small mammals such as mice may take housekeeping in your bird boxes. You should remove their nests (otherwise plan to put up additional boxes to house the birds and the rodents). Or, when the nesting season is over, open the front or side of a songbird house and leave it that way until spring.
- If bees or wasps have taken over a nest box, remove the nest and spray the inside of the box with a disinfectant.

### Very Important Advice:

- **Do Not** place bluebird houses on trees. Cats and raccoons can easily climb into the box from a tree.
- **Do Not** put perches on any birdhouses. The only birds that perches invite are house sparrows and European starlings. Remove any perches from boxes.
- **Do Not** use cans, milk cartons or metal for nests. They do not provide enough insulation.
- **Do Not** use sawdust for the bottom of a nest box. It packs down when wet and holds moisture. Instead use wood shavings or chain saw wood chips. They allow for better drainage.
- **Do Not** use wood treated with green preservative. When this is exposed to water it can produce poisonous vapors.

**If you follow these general instructions,  
you should have successful nesting for the coming year.**

## Backyard Wildlife Links

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Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres.

### **DNR Online... Inspired by nature!**

**National Wildlife Federation** - Details on their backyard habitat program [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org) or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at [www.mdflora.org](http://www.mdflora.org).

**Maryland Cooperative Extension** offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at [www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm](http://www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm) Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: [kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us).

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at [www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org)

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Habitat for Wildlife, Pheasants Forever** at [www.pheasantsforever.org](http://www.pheasantsforever.org) or e-mail: [pf@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:pf@pheasantsforever.org)

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### **Wild Acres Program**

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**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program  
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.**

<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>

